Job Applicant Interview Script

When the applicant arrives, put him or her at ease using a friendly, businesslike attitude. Let the applicant know that you're glad that they've come and that you have set aside sufficient uninterrupted time to conduct the interview. You can start the interview with chatter about hobbies, interests, etc., if you are comfortable doing so and are confident that you can stay away from personal questions that might be considered discriminatory. Or you can simply ask one of the following questions:

"How did you happen to become interested in our organization?"

"How did you hear of the opening?"

Depending on the response, you can work in an overview of what you have planned.

"Before we start, let me give you some idea of what I'd like to cover today. I want to review your background and experience so that I can decide whether the job is suited to your talents and interests. So, I'd like to hear about your job, education, interests, outside activities, and anything else you'd like to tell me. And after we have covered your background, I want to give you information about our organization and the job, and answer any questions that you might have."

Work Experience

A discussion of work experience should vary widely based, in part, on how long the applicant has been employed. Questions appropriate to a recent high school or college graduate will make little sense when interviewing a professional with 15 years of experience. For an applicant with substantial experience, a reasonable starting point would be a discussion of the most recent position. In addition to focusing on the jobs themselves, it might also be helpful to discuss why the applicant has changed jobs in the past, the duration of each prior employment, chronological gaps in employment, etc. The following script would be appropriate when interviewing someone who has not been working long.

"A good place to start would be your work experience."

"I'm interested in the jobs you've held, what your duties and responsibilities were, your likes and dislikes, and what you felt you may have gained from them."

"Let's start with a brief review of your first work experiences, those you might have had part-time during school or during the summer, and then we'll concentrate on your more recent jobs in more detail."

"What do you remember about your very first job?"

Select specific follow-up questions for each job and move forward chronologically. It's been suggested that you move forward chronologically because there's a more natural conversational flow and you can see patterns of behavior emerge.

Your follow-up questions should ask for specific examples of behavior, not general or hypothetical responses. Don't ask "Are you dependable?" because all you will get in response is a "Yes."

Instead, say, "Tell me about a day you got to work on time, only because of extra effort." It is focused on specific examples of behavior. Similarly, instead of asking,
"Are you organized?"
say "Tell me about a time when your organizational skills made a project successful" or "How did you organize your work in your last position?
How did you handle the unexpected?"

Ask specific, clear questions one at a time and let the applicant answer uninterrupted. Resist filling in every lull in the conversation; wait to see if the applicant will do so.

Avoid either verbally or physically giving the applicant a clue as to how you regard their answers; remain neutral.

To draw the applicant out without revealing what you're thinking, try using his or her own words. If the candidate says, "I like to work independently," you could respond with "Independently?" Of course, you could also use the opportunity to ask the applicant to give an example of what he or she did working independently.

After you have covered the applicant's work experience, you could move on to education.

Education

As in the case of the work experience portion of the interview, the education discussion must be tailored to suit the applicant's educational level. The sample interview that follows would be appropriate for a younger applicant who

has not been out of high school for any length of time. When interviewing for a professional position, the focus would shift to the professional education.

"You've given me a good review of your work experience—now let's talk about your education. Why don't we start with high school briefly and then cover more recent schooling and any specialized on the job training you may have had. I'm interested in the subjects you preferred, your grades, extracurricular activities, and anything else of importance."

"What was high school like for you?"

Select specific follow-up questions for each educational experience and move forward chronologically. Don't necessarily accept answers at face value. Chronology reveals patterns. Take the information and patterns of behavior that you're being told and analyze them in terms of the performance skills you determined that you needed before the interview began.

Activities and Interests

"Turning to the present, I'd like to give you the opportunity to mention some of your interests and activities outside of work—hobbies, what you do for fun and relaxation, any community activities, professional associations, or anything else you'd like to mention that you think might be relevant to our job.
What would you like to mention?"

Select specific follow-up questions.

Show interest and attention, as well as respect for the applicant. Don't talk down. Do use an appropriate language level.

Self-Assessment

"Now let's try to summarize our conversation.
Thinking about all we've covered today, what would you say are some of your strengths—qualities both personal and professional that make you a good prospect for any employer?"

Select specific follow-up questions as needed.

"You've given me some real assets, and now I'd like to hear about areas you'd like to develop further—all of us have qualities we'd like to change or improve. What are some of yours?"

Select specific follow-up questions as needed.

Transition to Information-Giving Phase

If you are still interested in the applicant, proceed to this phase of the interview. On the other hand, if you have already decided that the applicant isn't suitable, there isn't much point in describing a position that the applicant won't be filling.

"You've given me a good review of your background and experience, and I have enjoyed talking with you. Before we turn to my review of our organization, and the job, is there anything else about your background you would like to cover?"

"Do you have any specific questions or concerns before I give you information about the job and the opportunities here?"

All right, now I have some information I'd like to give you."

Review the organization, the job, benefits, location, etc.

Tailor your presentation as appropriate to your interest in the candidate.

Closing

"Do you have any other questions about us, the job, or anything else?"

Close the interview graciously. If you have already decided not to offer the applicant a job, you can let them know at this point. Do so cordially and uncritically; you needn't be specific about why you've rejected the candidate.

"I've enjoyed talking with you today, but we won't be able to offer you this position."

If you think that you would consider the applicant for another position in the future, say so. You've already spent the time on an interview.

If pressed for a reason why an applicant won't be offered a job, you always have the option of telling the applicant that you do not discuss the reasons for your hiring decisions. Or, you may explain that, for example, you have already interviewed other, more qualified applicants. Use your judgment, realizing that it can create a very awkward situation if you merely tell an applicant that he or she is "unqualified" or "lacking experience." Be honest, but don't be confrontational.

If you've found a promising candidate, you can continue.

"What is your level of interest in us at this point?"

Explore any doubts or reservations the applicant might have.

"Let me review what the next steps are."

Let the applicant know what's likely to happen next, whether another interview will be needed, and how long it will be before a decision is made.

"I want to thank you for coming today...."